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The many faces of devolution

Thomas S. Martin

Over the years the *Progressive Review* has reported on devolution, a force that has already disintegrated the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and is still growing on every continent. Devolution is a symptom of a broader disintegration, that of western civilization, with its traditional emphasis on centralized authority and the slow homogenization of the world's peoples into one bland amorphous Big-Mac-eating ethnic group. Fortunately, western culture also puts a high premium on education and individual rights, an emphasis that has backfired in some surprising ways. Allowing women to go to college was not meant to make them question patriarchy, for example. Devolution can happen when people get access to their own history and become educated enough to decide for themselves what it all means.

Even in North America, some unassimilated lumps are beginning to stick to the overheated bottom of the great melting pot. For example, the Akwesasne Nation, in spite of its serious internal problems, is a major devolutionary success. Established as a result of a 1784 treaty among the British, Americans and Iroquois, it straddles the international border southwest of Montréal and is formally known as the St. Regis Mohawk Indian Reservation. When the United States and Canada forced citizenship on their native people in 1924, the Akwesasne Mohawks declined the offer and reiterated that they had never been conquered by anyone and were not about to give up their nationality. They maintain close ties with the other five Iroquois nations, whose territories enjoy various levels of sovereignty as well. Federal, state and provincial authorities have tried over the years to legislate this embarrassing little country out of existence, but have not succeeded. On the contrary, each new assault backfired, creating yet another generation of Indians determined to hold on to their freedom.

In 1968, in response to Canadian efforts to restrict border crossings, the Mohawks launched a campaign of active resistance. The outpouring of ethnic pride and of support from many other native peoples surprised everyone. The past twenty-five years in Akwesasne afford many examples of "devolution from below." A planned interstate highway was stopped by a combination of direct action and legal proceedings. The bridge that crosses the St. Lawrence within Akwesasne territory was blockaded, halting international traffic, until the Mohawks were promised untrammeled access. Akwesasne representatives regularly attend conferences on colonialism and Fourth World issues, traveling on Six Nations passports. A Mohawk chief even petitioned the League of Nations for admission, as far back as 1923.

A glance through the pages of *Akwesasne Notes*, once the Mohawks' local newspaper but now a slick international chronicle of native struggles, demonstrates that Akwesasne is a nation in every sense of the word that matters. Recent issues advertised a conference on the St. Lawrence River ecosystem, a "Log Cabin" resort, a museum, Frogtown International Speedway, several producers of arts and crafts, posters, and native music, a casino, and even "CKON, 97.3 FM, Mohawk Nation Radio." The Mohawks have their own police force and flag, and their mailing address is not Rooseveltown, New York, but *via* Rooseveltown. The Mohawk struggle has a fascinating and paradoxical judicial history. Both the United States and Canada have always recognized in some sense the "sovereignty" of aboriginal peoples, though the courts have also always interpreted that sovereignty in such a way as to deny human and civil rights to the Indians.

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Editor: Sam Smith
The Progressive Review
1739 Connecticut Ave NW
Washington DC 20009
202-232-5544
Fax Nbr: 202-234-6222

Internet: ssmith @ igc. org
CompuServe: 72067,1525
Prodigy: SFGW68A
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Battered and violated though it may be, their unique legal status does provide a launching pad for the devolution of federal, state and local authority to the Indian nations. Even non-Indian activists, such as devolutionary activists in the Ozarks and "Cascadia," may be able to make use of the precedents set by the native peoples. The Euro- and African-American majority will have to take seriously - - if perhaps with a shudder -- a remark made decades ago by the Cuban freedom fighter José Martí: "America will not begin to walk until the Indian walks."

The devolution of native power is considerably more advanced in Canada than in the United States. The "First Nations" organization is now taken seriously by the government as a sort of internal UN. Large areas of western Canada have been returned to native control, and more will be. A 137,000 square mile segment of the Northwest Territories is now an Inuit (Eskimo) quasi-state known as Nunavut. There are in fact two Inuit nations -- the other is Kalaalit Nunaat, formerly known as Greenland; more may soon emerge in eastern Siberia. Indian politics in Canada is bound up intimately with one of the world's best known devolution campaigns, that of French-speaking Québec. The Cree tribe, with the support of the First Nations federation, played a role in the defeat of the separatist movement last October.

The Cree and their Inuit neighbors have watched the gradual destruction of their native country in northern Quebec by the mammoth James Bay hydroelectric project. Fearing that an independent Québec would accelerate the pace of spoliation, the Cree called on the Canadian government "to fulfill its historic, treaty, fiduciary and constitutional obligations of First Nations in Québec and Labrador," and declared "that we will not permit the historic links and relationships between the First Nations inside and outside Québec to be infringed or severed." In other words, if Québec goes its own way, it will have to do so without the northern two-thirds of its present territory.

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The abject failure of state and federal authorities in regard to native issues has led some tribes to bypass regular channels and deal directly with their white neighbors. Skagit County, a fast-growing suburban area on Puget Sound north of Seattle, offers a useful devolutionary model. The Swinomish Indians, who (with a few other tribal remnants) make up about one-third of the county's population, have developed a "Memorandum of Understanding" with the county commission. As a result of talks coordinated by the non-profit Northwest Renewable Resources Center, a comprehensive land use plan is now in place. The group brought together by the Center reminded the community that "we share a common thread . . . whether Native Americans or

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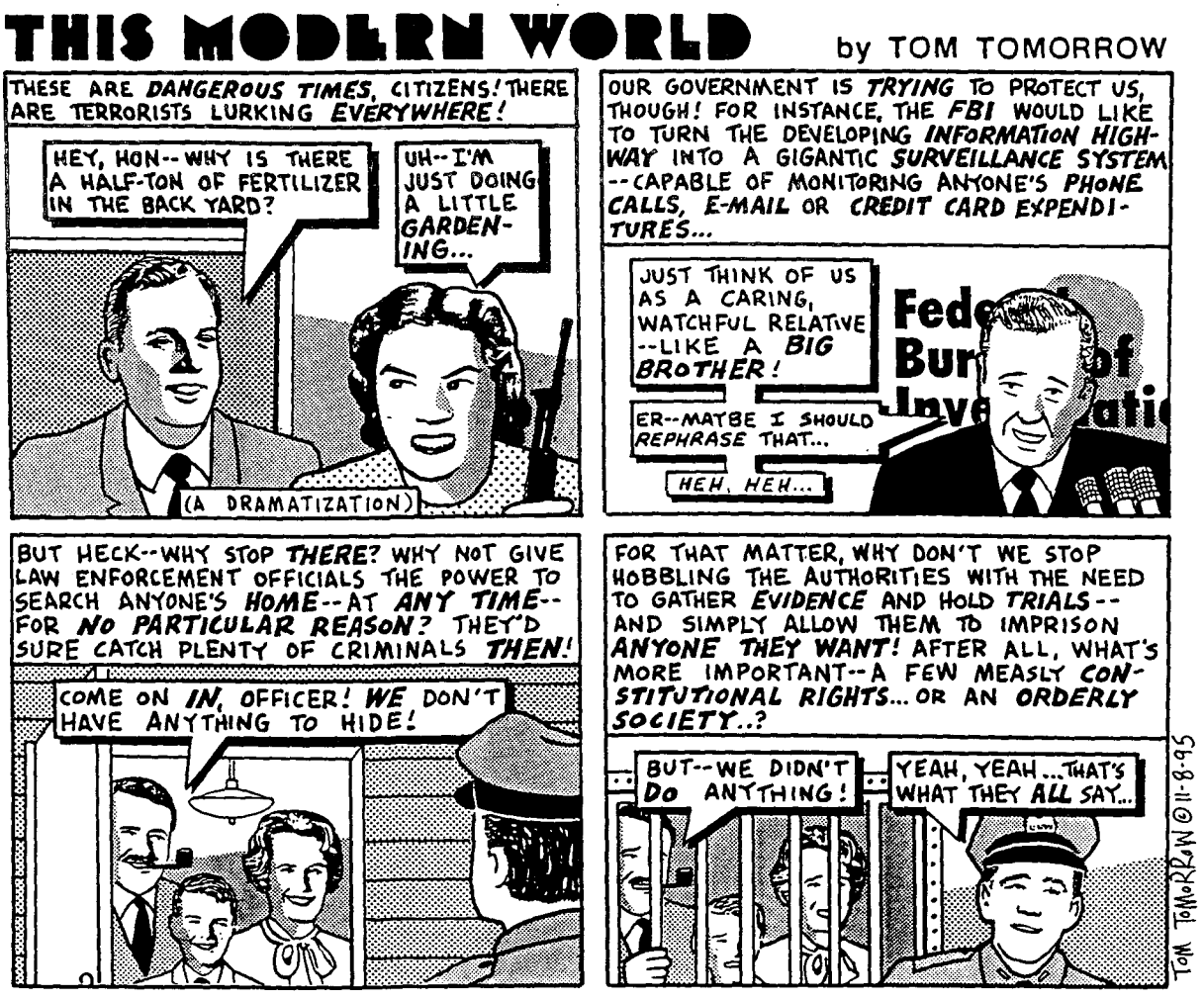
THIS MODERN WORLD
by TOM TOMORROW
THESE ARE DANGEROUS TIMES, CITIZENS! THERE ARE TERRORISTS LURKING EVERYWHERE!
HEY, HON--WHY IS THERE A HALF-TON OF FERTILIZER IN THE BACK YARD?
UH--I'M JUST DOING A LITTLE GARDEN-ING...
(A DRAMATIZATION)
OUR GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO PROTECT US, THOUGH! FOR INSTANCE, THE FBI WOULD LIKE TO TURN THE DEVELOPING INFORMATION HIGH-WAY INTO A GIGANTIC SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM --CAPABLE OF MONITORING ANYONE'S PHONE CALLS, E-MAIL OR CREDIT CARD EXPENDI-TURES...
JUST THINK OF US AS A CARING, WATCHFUL RELATIVE --LIKE A BIG BROTHER!
ER--MAYBE I SHOULD REPHRASE THAT...
HEH, HEH...
BUT HECK--WHY STOP THERE? WHY NOT GIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS THE POWER TO SEARCH ANYONE'S HOME--AT ANY TIME-- FOR NO PARTICULAR REASON? THEY'D SURE CATCH PLENTY OF CRIMINALS THEN!
COME ON IN, OFFICER! WE DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO HIDE!
FOR THAT MATTER, WHY DON'T WE STOP HOBBLING THE AUTHORITIES WITH THE NEED TO GATHER EVIDENCE AND HOLD TRIALS-- AND SIMPLY ALLOW THEM TO IMPRISON ANYONE THEY WANT! AFTER ALL, WHAT'S MORE IMPORTANT--A FEW MEASLY CON-STITUTIONAL RIGHTS... OR AN ORDERLY SOCIETY..?
BUT--WE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING!
YEAH, YEAH...THAT'S WHAT THEY ALL SAY...
TOM TOMORROW ©11-8-95

Caucasians, one hundredth generation or recent transplant, we are Skagitonians . . . we care deeply for the place where we live . . . we desire the best future for our Skagit Valley home."

The emerging "Swinomish Plan" is expanding to cover other long-standing disagreements, and has successfully kept a number of issues out of the state and federal courts. This sort of negotiation is now normally governed by the impossibly complex guidelines laid down by the US Supreme Court in *Brendale v. Yakima Nation* (1989). The Swinomish Plan avoids that morass. The Skagit County experience demonstrates that community activists, working face-to-face in an atmosphere of mutual respect, can solve problems long regarded as intractable. And of course they *are* intractable when they disappear into the maw of a vastly overgrown centralized government.

The newfound strength of native Americans does not always manifest itself in agreeable ways. Many tribal groups are now planning glorious futures based on casino revenues, and a few have already realized the dream. But many native Americans are now moving from ambivalence about these prime symbols of western decadence toward outright cynicism and opposition. While Indians have precious few options when it comes to earning money, it remains to be seen whether turning (say) Tahlequah or Window Rock into a red Las Vegas, and tribal elders into *Mafiosi* with briefcases full of hundred-dollar bills, will serve the deeper purposes of devolution.

Progressives and radicals are in search of a particular sort of devolved community, one that respects and celebrates diversity, defends the environment, advocates participatory democracy, and frowns on intrusions on our private lives while simultaneously encouraging community responsibility. Except in the case of native Americans, who for many reasons cannot be emulated by the rest of us, devolution presents few models upon which to build. A happy exception may be emerging in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where the Green Party has found a way to appeal to a broad cross-section of voters. Everyone in Santa Fe is concerned about skyrocketing real estate prices and a tax system that threatens to displace both poor people and rich families who have occupied farms and ranches for centuries. A comprehensive new tax plan was forged in 1995 by the Greens and passed in the state legislature, though it was

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vetoed by Governor Bruce King. Other projects have been more successful. A Green now sits on the city council, and many Green candidates have won large percentages of the vote for other offices. The party is putting together a local bartering currency, Santa Fe Hours; mediation has been introduced for various legal disputes; and the Living Wage Campaign aims at organizing workers at the bottom of the compensation pyramid. Taxi drivers, hotel and hospital employees have already been helped. Perhaps best of all, a Green radio program bumped Rush Limbaugh off the air in Santa Fe. The Greens are not, however, the only pro-devolution progressives in the city. A broad coalition of citizens and office-holders has beaten back corporate land developers and is committed to narrowing the gap between rich and poor.

One of the most encouraging portents of a successfully devolved future is the "community currency" movement. The idea of dispensing with government-issue fiat money in favor of an organized local barter system has been around for a long time. The subsistence economy of medieval Europe worked this way, as did Josiah Warren's "Time Store" in 1840s Cincinnati and the various "People's Banks" based on Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's philosophy.

In fact community currencies flourished in the remoter parts of the United States before the Federal Reserve Act put a stop to such nonsense in 1913. Localized currency can operate in a great variety of ways, but all have one thing in common: they obstruct the accumulation of wealth by a privileged few, and the subsequent manipulation of everyone else. They keep wealth (in whatever form) within the community, and require everyone to take an active interest in the ups and downs of the local economy. Perhaps the best known American local currency is "Ithaca HOURS," created in 1991 and now used by nearly a thousand people and businesses in the New York college town. "In Ithaca We Trust," says every HOUR note, a devolutionary sentiment if we ever saw one. The value of an HOUR is pegged at ten US dollars, but so much negotiation and horse-trading takes place with every transaction that the figure is almost meaningless. Interested participants meet every month at a pot-luck dinner to discuss HOURS policy. The notes can be used to purchase almost every imaginable product and service.

Four hundred communities in the United States and Canada have consulted Ithaca for help in setting up their own systems, and about two dozen have actually done so. The E. F. Schumacher Society -- Schumacher was the author of the revolutionary economic treatise, *Small Is Beautiful* -- sponsors a somewhat different program in and around Great Barrington, Massachusetts.

The LETS program in British Columbia operates without paper notes; members have computerized accounts, which are credited and debited as individuals provide or contract for various kinds of jobs with one another. LETS systems now number in the hundreds, primarily in Great Britain but also in the United States and Australia. Finally, there is the system of Time Dollars, described in the book of the same name by Edgar Cahn and Jonathan Rowe. These moneyless exchange systems are far from perfect, but the fact that they do exist and even flourish in the face of voracious capitalism is heartening.

Now for the ugly side of the picture. Not all devolved communities are a step in the right direction. Walt Disney Enterprises already owns Orlando and has metastasized throughout much of the surrounding countryside, creating the sort of community some of us have sweat-drenched nightmares about. The latest project is "Celebration," a model town of 20,000 citizens to be constructed in Osceola County (which is named, by the way, for a great Seminole chief who fought all his life to keep Florida in its pristine state). Celebration will, according to Disney publicists, solve all the problems of blighted *fin-de-siécle* urban America. Apparently it will do so by requiring its residents to live on Norman Rockwell-type Main Streets, to shop at Harrod's in the "Celebration Center" mall, and to toil at "The Workplace," a model high-tech industrial center that Frederick Taylor would have swooned over. An "Institute" will offer "learning vacations."

All of this will be open to tourists, of course. Watch for the upbeat commercials. The Celebration schools will be part of the Osceola County system, and will drain away much- needed funds from less fortunate classrooms. Disney even expects to build a teachers' training academy -- a scary thought indeed: "If Mickey leaves the Tomorrowland station traveling at fifty miles per hour, and Simba leaves EPCOT at the same time, traveling at thirty miles per hour. . . ." Actually, a videotape celebrating the proposed school system shows plenty of polite well-dressed students, but no teachers at all.

The average cost of a house or condominium in Celebration is expected to run between $120,00 and one

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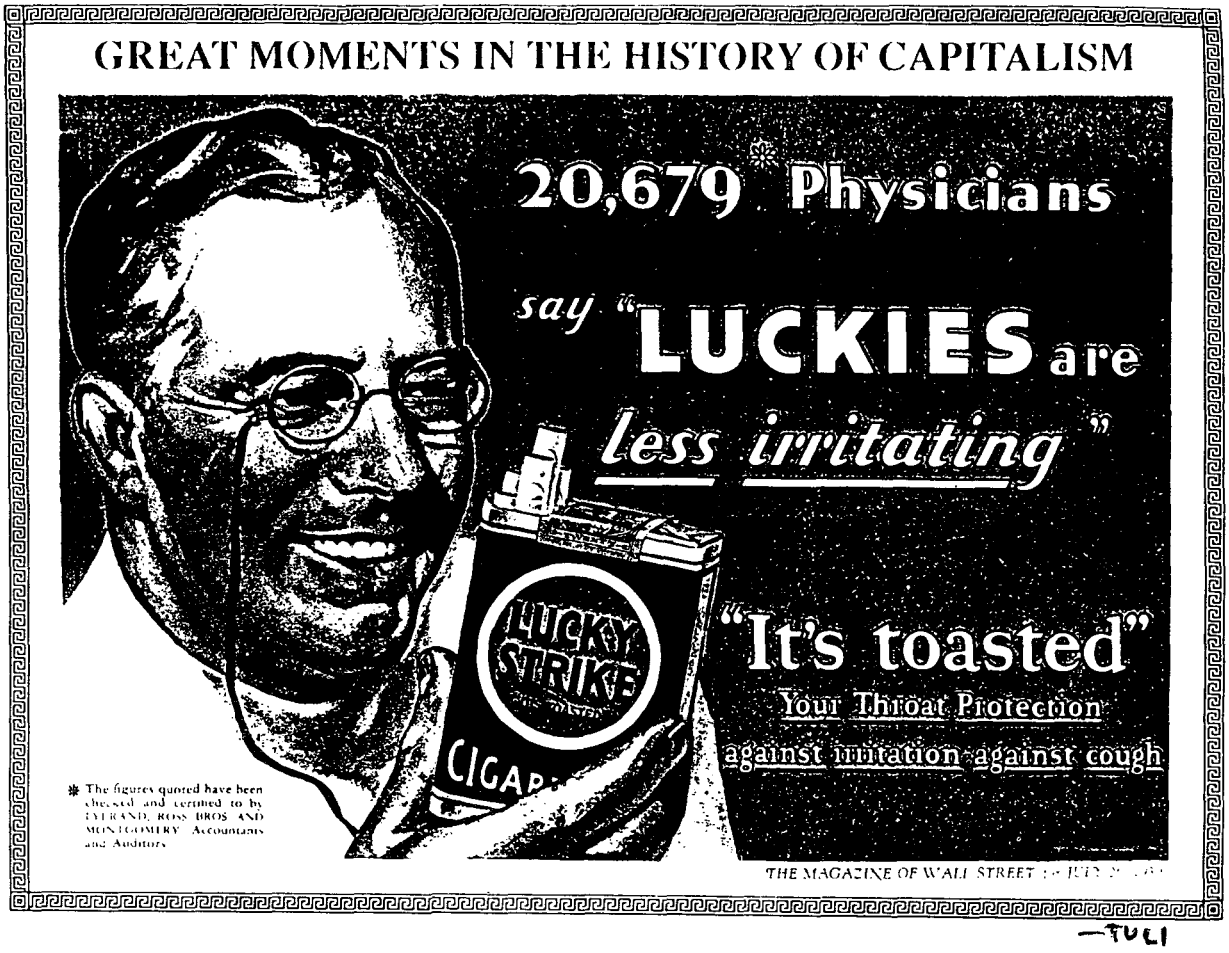
GREAT MOMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF CAPITALISM
20,679* Physicians
say "LUCKIES are
less irritating"
"It's toasted"
Your Throat Protection
against irritation-against cough
LUCKY STRIKE
* The figures quoted have been checked and certified to by LYBRAND, ROSS BROS AND MONTGOMERY Accountants and Auditors
THE MAGAZINE OF WALL STREET
—TULI

million dollars. One imagines that few people of color, single mothers, or (God forbid!) homeless folk will be found wandering the happy streets of the "Town Center." It is hard to envisage any sort of community politics in Celebration. Everyone will be directly or indirectly a Disney employee. The corporation would like everyone to forget that EPCOT, in the early seventies, was also expected to be a lived-in "community of the future." It didn't happen.

And will the tourists come? Even this writer, a college professor, does not want a "learning vacation." Perhaps Celebration will attract the sort of visitors who also like old "Twilight Zone" reruns. "It's so peaceful, so clean . . . it *looks* like Oakdale, but I just have this terrible feeling in the pit of my stomach that *something's wrong. . . .*"

Speaking of nightmares, the frightening growth of the militia movement in the past few years is also a symptom of devolution fever, and one that progressives and libertarians can take a lesson from. Men (and the small number of women) who join militias often do so out of frustration with an establishment that has grown too large and impersonal for anyone to deal with rationally. Some, of course, join for the phallic rush they get from handling massive weapons and wearing combat fatigues. To focus on the paranoid silliness of the militias is, however, to miss the main point. Everyone needs a sense of solidarity and belonging, and this can come from a fascist gang as well as from a Green Party affinity group.

The difference is that the white-supremacy crowd fears diversity while Greens and other progressives embrace it. To classify non-whites as "pre-Adamic mud people" does not foster the sort of community sense that the devolution movement is looking for. It is clear, however, that progressives will have to guard against many forms of exclusivity as the nation-state fragments. Not all of them will be as easy to spot as the militia morons.

These are only a few glimpses at the devolutionary possibilities, good and evil, in 1990s America. Third parties are cropping up everywhere -- not so much the "national" variety, bought and paid for by Ross Perot, but parties organized at the state or local level to confront state and local problems. Home schooling is essentially a devolutionary concept, even when practiced by hysterical fundamentalists. Polls show that many people who do not vote in national races still vote in local elections.

Devolution as a coherent movement with generally accepted goals does not exist in the United States -- yet. It is still operating at the grassroots level, which of course is as it should be. The time will come, however,

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when all proponents of devolution will have to admit that that's what they are, and try to come up with some sort of ideology.

Plenty of models exist. When devolution takes a "nationalist" form the results are often very ugly -- as in Bosnia, Chechnya, East Timor, and Ogoni. In Québec or Scotland only the rhetoric is ugly, so far; but the potential for violence cannot be ignored. The same might happen with American Indians, if they were numerous and well-armed enough. But this is a world of nations and ethnic groups, like it or not; devolutionists will have to discover a way to use national pride in a positive and non-violent manner. Education is probably the key. Non-traditional historians and sociologists have proved beyond all doubt that ethnic identity is socially constructed and has nothing to do with ancestry. Geneticists back them up with new evidence that even "race" is a biologically meaningless concept. If the next generation can be taught the truth about these matters, we may achieve a world in which one can take pride in being Mohawk or Serbian or just "American" without ever thinking that difference implies superiority.

The devolution movement will also have to be wary of right-wing agendas masquerading as "localism" or "communitarianism." Corporations and ranchers in the Rocky Mountain region want to devolve the power to make land policy down to the states and counties -- not to empower local citizens, but so that the plutocrats can rape the environment. Often the agendas are more subtle and deeply hidden.

The "communitarian" movement created by Amitai Etzioni, and now extolled by some among the Gingrichians and Kristolites, looks rather attractive at first glance. Devolutionists should always be alert, however, to who is praising what ideology. Etzioni's academese is rather hard to plow through, but what he seems to advocate is obedience to authority, sublimation of personal desires for the greater good, and rigid adherence to the rules of good manners. In any case the communitarians see no need to break the world up into smaller political or social units in order for their plan to work. Evidently two hundred and fifty million of us can be just as polite to one another as two hundred and fifty.

In the end, perhaps, it might be most useful to judge the devolution movement by its effect on our deteriorating environment. When it comes from oppressed people or the grassroots levels, at least, devolution appears to be synonymous with ecological sanity. If the history of the world teaches us anything at all, it is that small, cohesive groups of people tread more lightly upon the land than do vast artificially-constructed nation states. The councils of the Iroquois nations always consider, when discussing innovations, how the policy in question will affect their descendants down to the seventh generation. This is a valuable lesson. It is not a question of numbers -- population, profit, GNP -- but rather of scale and attitude. We should remember that as we approach the end of the most violent and devastating century in human history.

Thomas S. Martin teaches at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio

Checkbook plagiarism

Having inveighed against political ghostwriting for over thirty years, it comes as no surprise that Hillary Clinton's book-like substance was produced with significant editorial aid -- in fact, $120,000 worth. My position has been that the standard for politicians in such matters should be at least as high as that for college freshmen. If the latter were to pay someone to write their papers, the full weight of academia would come crashing down upon them. At the higher levels of society, however, such behavior is considered normal and even admirable. At the very least, however, politicians should be required to list the names of their ghostwriters on the ballot and to resign from public office should their scribes decide to change clients.

What is amazing is that Ms. Clinton should actually have tried to conceal the assistance she received, adding to this deception the absurd claim that she wrote her bookoid long-hand in six months. If true, it would have been the greatest literary feat since Alexander Dumas wrote three books in one year. When he finished *The Count of Monte Cristo*, he drew a line on the sheet of paper, and immediately commenced *The Three Musketeers.*

Twice I have written books -- real ones -- in six months (one on a typewriter and one on a computer) and I can assure you it is only barely possible even with mechanical aids. If Ms. Clinton is to make the claim -- unsupported by any excerpts I've seen -- that she is a writer as well as a lawyer, then I think she should adhere the rules of our trade as closely as those of the ABA. Ours are not as well codified, but they include the notion that one does one's own work, that if you are unable to do so, you hire a real writer and give them decent credit, and finally that you observe what Thoreau called the first rule of exposition, which is to speak the truth. -- *Sam Smith*

- Amount needed to rebuild or fix nation's school buildings according to the GAO: $112 billion *[New York Times]*
- Number of US representatives who bought bottled water with taxpayer funds who also voted against improved drinking water standards: 79 *[Physicians for Social Responsibility]*

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USA Tomorrow

After many months of research and development, the Progressive Review *is pleased to report the first details of its forthcoming daily newspaper:* USA Tomorrow.

The design of a daily newspaper is the result, among other things, of tradition, market surveys, the prejudices of the owner and the editors' attempt to figure out what these prejudices are. It can be, by consequence, a product that nobody really wants. For example, at one point our new paper was nearly named Newt, *after the father of our country's demise, but fortunately that idea was quashed as was the concept of having the publication entirely edited by the offspring of celebrities.*

What did result from our efforts was a set of principles for a new newspaper that represent a revolutionary departure from current journalistic practice, to wit:

1. The front page will be almost entirely devoted to news. News is defined as something that has happened, something that is happening or something that is going to happen. News is not what someone said about what is happening nor what someone perceived was going to happen nor what the editors thought the impact of something happening would be on its readership.

2. Stories will have to get to the point within the first paragraph or two.

3. Opposition to any policy will be reported on the same page as the main headline and not on the jump page as is commonly now the case. In fact, jump pages will be eliminated where possible and no story will jump more than two pages. Editors know that few readers turn to the jump page, which is why they bury so much good stuff there.

4. Next to any story about pending legislation will be a box listing what the bill actually contains. This data is increasingly considered extraneous in contemporary journalism.

5. Early in any story about a proposed policy will be some indication as to who is likely to be helped and who is likely to be hurt if it is approved.

6. The exception to hard news on the front page would be one or two stories selected for their human interest or literary quality. Throughout the paper will be stories that are funny or interesting even if not newsworthy.

7. All perceptions (including those excised from the front page and those typical of op-ed pages) will be published in a section called *Perceptions.* Space will be given based on a rigorous analysis of the perceptiveness of previous perceptions. This is unlike the current situation in which people are allowed to perceive based solely on their position or fame rather than actual prescience. Letters to the editors will compete according to these principles on a equal basis with paid columnists.

8. Somewhere towards the back of the paper will be several pages devoted to quotations, official and otherwise. This section will have something of the feel (and small type size) of the classified section. Since highly ranked persons can easily be solicited for quotes by broadcast fax, this improvement alone, if widely adopted, could free up several hundred Washington reporters for actual news coverage in place of several hours at lunch with an assistant secretary of state in order to obtain a ten second print bite.

9. Journalists would be encouraged to think of themselves as part of a trade and craft that sometimes rises to an art -- but which is never a mere profession. They will be gently reminded that British journalists call themselves "hacks."

10. Reporters will be expected to know how to write. The submission of databases with transition sentences will no longer be permitted.

11. Perhaps most controversial will be *USA Tomorrow's* gossip section. It will surely be attacked by other papers as "sleazy, supermarket tabloid journalism." But the section will be premised on an incontrovertible fact: the powerful in Washington and elsewhere thrive on gossip. Why should the American people be denied access to the same information as their leaders and journalists?

12. The obituary department will be staffed by good writers who will be encouraged to remember that it's the subject and not their copy that is supposed to be dead.

13. There will be a section called *Style With Class:* Unlike the *Washington Post's Style* section, the tacky -- as well as most of the rich and famous -- will be excluded. Those featured will have to have some admirable qualities rather than just being notorious. The egregious, outrageous and avaricious who make up the better part of lifestyle sections will be relegated to a new section called *Can You Believe This?*

14. News that affects ordinary readers will be removed from the business and real estate sections and put in the front of the paper where it belongs.

15. There will be heavy use of news photos. In particular, the use of a sequence of photos to tell a story will be revived. People will once again be given a chance to reflect on news images rather than just having them flash subliminally by on TV.

16. The sports section will resume telling people what actually happened during athletic contests. Salary negotiations, athlete attitude problems, and random downloads from the cortex of sports columnists will be printed only on a space available basis.

17. There will be no editorial page. As a sop to the editors, however, one or two *signed* editorials will be permitted. If they don't get better quickly, however, these, too, will have to go.

--Sam Smith

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The budget stampede

The way legislation is supposed to work Congress sends the president a bill, which he can either sign or veto. Congress can then either drop the matter or pass the bill over the president's veto. But here's the catch: we *must* have appropriations bills; Congress can't just say: forget about the budget this year. So the only real choices are to come up with legislation that the president will sign or pass it over the president's veto.

But Gingrich and the GOP boomer bullies in the House weren't interested in either course. They certainly didn't want to meet the president halfway and coming up with a measure that would override the president's veto would have required negotiations with moderate and conservative Democrats -- again, not in their plan. What they wanted was to stage an end run around the Constitution. By holding the White House and the country hostage, they figured they could get their legislation passed by a simple majority rather than the two-thirds it should have required. The media missed this essential point entirely, playing up the dispute as a Congress-White House dog-fight rather than the proto-putsch against constitutional tradition and political decency that it was.

Not only was the technique reprehensible, the goal it served was deeply counter-productive. As we have pointed out ever since the budget balancing mania caught on in the 1992 campaign, one of the effects of deficit slashing is to increase the likelihood of a recession. This is because reducing government spending means taking money out of the economy and the economy, despite conservative theory, doesn't know whether the money it is losing comes from the government or from Walmart.

Frederick Thayer, a visiting professor at George Washington University, has noted something even more startling. There have been six times in American history when the national debt was reduced. In each case a major depression followed. These have been our *only* depressions.

In an article in *The Washington Spectator*, Thayer made a number of other cogent points:

☞ Why is it that we worry about the effect of the "crushing debt" on our children and grandchildren in peacetime, but not during wars when we run up enormous deficits? "Obviously," says Thayer, "the 'crushing burden' could have been avoided by not responding to the attack on Pearl Harbor."

☞ If the cost of entitlements seem unfair to young people, how much more onerous will be the cost of having to take care of parents out of one's own paycheck at some time in some amount not of one's choosing? This is "a problem that the Concord Coalition studiously avoids discussing."

☞ The sequence of a balanced budget followed by a depression has a number of unhappy consequences. For example, so many Americans in the 1930s were underfed and unhealthy that military rejection rates of 40 to 50 percent were common.

☞ We have a public policy of maintaining an unemployment rate around 6%. Yet we demand welfare reform. "The unemployed are blamed for being jobless and on welfare even thought they are unknowingly performing the patriotic duty that public policy has assigned to them. They are performing the job of not working."

☞ "A publicly financed bridge is considered 'wasteful' because it has no market value. According to official wisdom, this is not an investment. A privately financed brewery is 'wealth' because it is considered to be worth at least the cost of building it. But this ignores the likelihood that the bridge may be necessary for the operation of the brewery."

Fortunately, there is not much chance that we will get around to actually reducing the national debt. In fact, the seven year target for balancing the budget almost assures that we will have forgotten about this whole charade by that time. Do you remember anything Congress promised you in 1989?

Kevin Phillips actually does. One reason he is skeptical of this whole business is because he can cite three other recent instances of balanced budget mania, none of which had any substantial effect on deficits (and didn't come near reducing the debt). Philips believes the real reason for all these efforts has been (1) to cut government, (2) to cut taxes and (3) to help the financial markets.

This continues to hold true. For example, the current dispute could have gone away long ago were it not for the GOP determination to reduce taxes. The dispute, in fact, shouldn't be called an argument over the budget but rather one over taxes. The Republicans want to improve their own budget balances and not the country's.

Warming to warming

As recently as a few months ago, the conventional media wisdom was that global warming might exist but was mostly unproved. Then came the big blizzard and, starting with *Newsweek*, the tone of coverage on the subject made a dramatic shift. The media's warming to warming may also be related in part to a realization that it is not just eco-freaks who are concerned but those considered real people -- such as representatives of major insurance companies.

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The change presents the intriguing possibility that the 1996 election won't be fought over deficits at all, but over the environment. Here's how it could work out: Clinton drops out of the race because of Whitewater. Gore is named the Democratic candidate. The country suffers an extraordinary heat wave next summer followed by the greatest number of hurricanes ever to hit the US coast. Sales of Gore's book surge past those of Colin Powell, and -- aided by a heavy dose of bragging about cutting out government waste -- Gore ends up in the White House.

Drug Busts

To give you an idea of how futile the drugs wars are, consider the drug testing experience of Steelcase. In 1989, the firm subjected nearly 800 job applicants to both urine and hair tests. While the urine test showed only 3% positive results, the hair tests showed 18%. That means that nearly one in five applicants were criminals by state and federal definition.

The Lee County FL school board is considering whether to impose random drug tests on its entire upper school body. Lee County already conduct warrantless searches of student lockers with few results.

Meanwhile, San Francisco new prosecutor says he will not charge nonviolent crimes, such as drug offenses, under the state's three strikes law. AP reports that 63% of current three strikes cases in SF involve drugs.

In another sign of military intrusion into civilian affairs, Army reservists worked with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation in anti-pot forays. Said one Army official: "We want the public to become more aware of what we're doing. This is an ongoing war on our soil. We want people to see the Army involved in a war right here -- a war against drugs . . . We're fighting a war in our own hometowns -- a war we'll fight every day until, finally, we win."

The Flat Tax Society

It would be nice if someone in the major media would point out that the flatness of a tax has little to do with its simplicity. Arguing that simplicity and flatness are inexorably linked is the basic lie of current tax proposals and proponents are not being called on it. Neither is anyone asking them to explain why capital gains have to be eliminated in order to simplify taxation. As we have pointed ever since Jerry Brown raised the issue four years ago, the goal should be a thin tax and not a flat tax. Tax simplification -- but not a flat tax -- makes a lot of sense.

On the other hand, some media have given attention to the consequences of a flat tax for the various candidates. For example, Dole would save about $63,000 on his taxes, Gramm, $15,000 and Lamar Alexander, $261,000 (all based on 1994 returns). God knows what Forbes would save -- he won't release his returns. But the Center for Public Integrity estimates that Steve Forbes -- a big promoter of the flat tax -- would save at least $128,000 a year in taxes if such a policy were instituted.

Field notes

- *The Political Truth: A Voter's Guide to the 1996 Presidential Candidates & Elections.* Information on the various Republican candidates for president (and Bill Clinton, too) along with organizational voting scores and other data. $14.95 + $4 P&H from Publication Services, 8870 Business Park Drive, Austin TX 78759.

- *The Greens & the Politics of Transformation* by John Rensenbrink, which was quoted in the last issue of the *Review*, is available in paperback for $17 postpaid from Miles & Miles, Box 6730, Eureka CA 95503.

- *Whole Life Economics: Revaluing Daily Life:* Talks about what's left out of the GDP and the Consumer Price Index and takes the reader inside the invisible economy of the country. [$14.95 + $3 P&H from New Society Publishers, 4527 Springfield Ave., Philadelphia, PA 14.95]

- *The Buying of the President:* by Charles Lewis and the Center for Public Integrity. An investigation of the money behind the major 1996 presidential candidates. Ten top career patrons of the various candidates plus other important financial information. [Center for Public Integrity, 202-783-3900]

- *White House E-Mail: The Top Secret Computer Messages the Reagan/Bush White House Tried to Destroy:* This is a modern version of what the historians call primary sources. The e-mail messages reveal all sorts of goodies including top Reagan officials (Gen. Powell among them) presiding over covert intelligence support to Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War and plans to clean up Manuel Noriega's image. Says Poindexter at one point: "I have nothing against him other than his illegal activities." [New Press, NY. Includes 1.44 mg computer disk.]

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Roadsigns

- Amount Milwaukee County WI spent in 1988 to fight the effects of poverty: $1 billion. Income to a three-member low-income family if this money had been converted into a direct payment: $33,379 *[The Neighborhood Works]*
- Annual cost of UN and its peacekeeping for each US citizen: less than $4. *[Bulletin of Atomic Scientists]*
- Number of Iraqi children who have died as a result of international sanctions: 500,000 *[Lancet]*
- Amount the government spends per death on three diseases, each killing 40,0000-46,000 people a year. Breast cancer: $11,500. Prostate cancer: $2,000. AIDS: $40,000. *[Penthouse]*
- Number of aircraft the military has given police departments since 1992: 183. Number of helicopters it plans to give police departments over the next few years: 2,000. *[AP]*
- Estimated annual cost in lost productivity of highway congestion according to the GAO: $100 billion. *[The Trainrider]*
- Increase in the Drug Enforcement Agency's budget for LSD cases since 1989: 200%. Last time DEA busted a major LSD lab: 1981 *[Pacific News Service]*
- Number of blacks elected to Congress since 1870: 95. *[Rainbow Coalition]*
- Number of persons indicted in 1994 by the Justice Department and US Attorneys : 51,253. Number of these indicted on drug charges: 19,533. Number indicted for crimes involving the environment, occupational safety or health: 250. Percent of corporate general counsels who told the *National Law Journal* that they believed their company had violated federal or state environmental laws in the previous year: 66%. [David Burnham, *Above the Law*]
- Percent of all cases referred to the Justice Department in 1994 in which it acted: 50%. Percent of all immigration cases it prosecuted: 85%. Percent of all drug cases: 63%. Percent of corruption cases: 35% Percent of all white-collar crime cases: 30%. Percent of civil rights cases: less than 5%. [Burnham]
- Percent of all AIDS cases that occur in the developing world: 85%. Percent of all money for AIDS prevention that is spent in the developing world: 15%. *[Nation]*

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